South Zone Hazardous Fuels Reduction Projects

PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

The U.S. Forest Service's Boulder and Clear Creek Ranger Districts are working to minimize the threat of wildfire to communities and watersheds in the South Zone by reducing hazardous fuels, restoring forest health, and creating more resilient forests for the future.

Why is the U.S. Forest Service cutting trees?

Over the past decade, multiple massive fires have swept across portions of Colorado's Front Range, consuming forests, destroying thousands of homes, taking lives and impacting valuable watersheds. Wildfire plays a necessary role in Colorado's ecosystems. However, the interruption of historic fire cycles has led to the dangerous buildup of fuels in some wildland areas. To lower the potential intensity and spread of wildfires near communities, the U.S. Forest Service is working to establish forest openings and reduce the overstory canopy along some of the forested boundary areas near private residences and communities.

How were the decisions made?

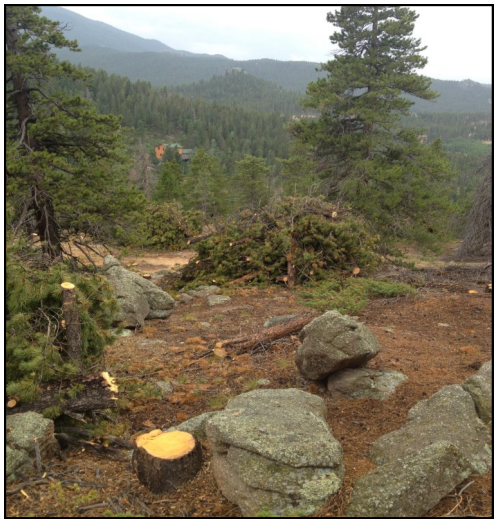
Through a collaborative process with stakeholders, public involvement and outreach, the South Zone made 15 fuels reduction decisions, between 2000-2012. The decisions were based on extensive environmental analysis through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process conducted by specialists in various scientific fields. They based the analysis on the purpose and need to reduce hazardous fuels that contribute to the increased spread and intensity of wildfire. The projects that have evolved out of these decisions will also manage the impacts of insects, disease and drought while minimizing effects to wildlife, watersheds and other resources.

Will the future forest be more resilient?

The forest is a dynamic system and forest management strategies need to allow for temporal and spatial variation. Foresters have carefully studied the latest research on restoring more resilient forests. In areas dominated by lodgepole pine, canopy openings are created and a diverse mix of conifer species seedlings, including ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and rust-resistant limber pine are planted where applicable to promote diversity and adaptability to climate and fire in the forested landscape. Lodgepole pine is expected to regenerate naturally and will be thinned over future years to encourage a mixture of conifer species. The project will also enhance and expand open meadows and aspen stands to modify the spread, behavior and intensity of wildfire.

What's being planned next?

The U.S. Forest Service is continuing to work with local fire departments and municipal governments to integrate its treatments into wildfire mitigation efforts proposed in the Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Future planning will work to link the work the U.S. Forest Service is doing with protective actions being taken on private property and other governmental managed lands.



Forsythe Project-Gross task order, hazard tree reduction on FS boundary with adjacent private land and residence.

Hazardous Fuels at a Glance:

Definitions:

Fuels Projects (NEPA decision): The project area and proposed actions that are analyzed through the NEPA process and public involvement.

Fuel Task Order: The smaller implementation areas of the project decision.

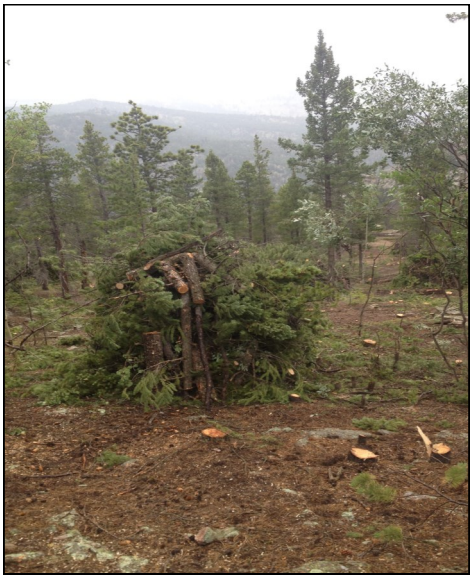
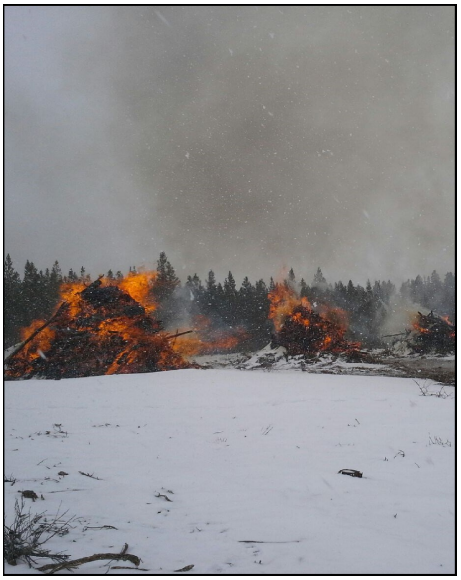
The following project decisions have vegetation or fuels treatments actions. Task Orders will be used to implement the following project decisions and they may occur anytime over the next 10 years.

Boulder Ranger District:

- Forsythe Project Decision 2012
- Ned Water Plant Project Decision 2012
- Button Rock Project Decision 2012
- Gold Hill Project Decision 2011
- Lump Gulch Project Decision 2009
- Gill Project Decisions 2006 and 2009
- Bar K Project Decision 2008
- St.Vrain Project Decision 2005
- James Creek Project Decision 2004
- Sugarloaf Project: Decision 2004
- Winiger Project Decision 2000

Clear Creek Ranger District:

- Mad Creek Project Decision 2009
- Evergreen TSI Project Decision 2008
- Yankee Hill Project Decision 2007
- Evergreen Project Decision 2004

(First photo from left) St.Vrain Project-Taylor Mtn. Task Order, three years post treatment. Note open meadows and ponderosa forest.
(Second and third photos) Manual fuels treatment activities often result in slash piles that must be chipped or burned.

What to expect:

■ The U.S. Forest Service is applying appropriate fuels mitigation treatments based on the existing vegetation type in order to meet the purpose and need of the fuels reduction NEPA decisions. These treatments are different according to the type of stand: lodgepole dominated versus mixed conifer and ponderosa pine dominated.

■ In lodgepole dominated stands, openings will be no larger than 20 acres and have been carefully designed by landscape specialists to reduce the visual impact. "Feathered" edges will make clearings appear more natural as the future forest develops.

■ Some of the forested stands being cut consist of primarily lodgepole pine, which are susceptible to wildfire and insect and disease infestation.

■ In mixed conifer stands trees of all age sizes maybe cut to reduce ladder fuels and reduce crown bulk density. Some large, healthy trees will be cut to reduce the forested canopy, thereby slowing the spread and lessening the intensity of wildfire.

For regular project updates: *Send an email with subject line "add to email list"* to BRDvis@fs.fed.us or visit www.fs.usda.gov/goto/arp/brdfuels .

Types of Fuel Treatments:

Mechanical Treatment:

Completed with logging equipment.

An estimated 95 percent of merchantable material is being removed from the site for use by the industry in products ranging from structure lumber to post and poles, landscaping materials and even biomass fuels. This reduces the need to construct and burn slash piles at a later date.

Manual Treatment:

Completed with hand crews using chainsaws.

Slash material is piled and will then be chipped (depending on the slope) or burned once the material dries out.

Many neighboring private residences are creating defensible space on their adjacent property utilizing manual treatment methods.

Tree Planting:

Tree planting of fire resistant ponderosa, limber pine and Douglas fir

Cone Collection:

Conifer cones from fire resistant ponderosa and limber pine trees are collected in the fall and shipped to the Bessey Nursery in Halsey, NE. The seeds are extracted and grown to small seedlings and then returned back to the forest to be planted in a project area.